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THE NEED OF AN AMERICAN SCHOOL OF LIVING ORIENTAL LANGUAGES

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MR. PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN ORIENTAL
SOCIETY :

I regret very keenly that owing to circumstances beyond my control, I cannot have the pleasure of addressing you in person and expressing the deep interest of the Department of State in the proposal to establish a school for Living Oriental Languages.

The war has taught us, among many things, that our whole conception of the world must undergo a radical change. No longer can forty odd separate nations lead their separate lives, cherish their individual ambitions, regardless of consequences, and forcibly disagree whenever they feel in a petulant state of mind. Modern warfare is too terrible a sacrifice, and the principle of the League of Nations is being hailed as the guiding influence which ultimately will bind all the nations of the world into strong and virile friendship. The intention of the framers of the League is to establish a machine which will have as its object the harmonizing of the divergent interests of nations, the recommending of a practical remedy for disputes, and, in a hundred ways, the drawing of the nations of the earth into a more sympathetic relationship. Taking for granted that the principle of the League of Nations will be adopted, it becomes the duty of Americans to prepare themselves for the responsibilities that America must assume in world affairs.

Our educational institutions have comforted themselves that they were performing their whole duty by encouraging the study of modern European languages on the theory, I suppose, that the life of this country is identified principally with that of Europe and Latin America. If they would stop to think that less than half the peoples of the earth speak modern European languages and that our nearest neighbors on the west are the great countries of Japan and China, with populations approximately of four hundred millions, they would realize that with-

out the study of Oriental languages, they are not performing their full duties to the coming generation of American students. Why are we so blind to the fact that our relations with Japan and China must necessarily grow closer and more intimate and that without a knowledge of the Japanese and Chinese languages we cannot do our part in cementing these relations? A leading Japanese said recently at a semi-official banquet in Tokyo: 'We understand Americans but America does not understand us. We have thousands of young men who have been educated in American schools and colleges, while you Americans have scarcely a half-dozen men who know enough of the Japanese language to understand Japanese thought at first hand.' America has capital and skilled talent, but she has comparatively few men who can put her in real and intelligent contact with every day life of the Far East.

Let us discuss for a moment the practical benefits to the Government that would follow the establishment in the United States of a school or schools for Oriental languages. Because there are no institutions in this country that teach Japanese, Chinese, Turkish or Arabic languages, Congress has made appropriation for the establishment in Peking, Tokyo and Constantinople of what might be called 'schools' attached to our Diplomatic Missions in these Capitals, and young men who have passed a general examination on other subjects in Washington, are sent there to learn the languages of the country and ultimately to enter the Consular Service. It is not a very alluring prospect. The majority of students who apply for positions of 'Student Interpreter,' as we call them, have no previous knowledge of the East and little idea of the difficulties of acquiring an Oriental language. Naturally some are tempted by a system which allows them to live the attractive life of a student in the East at Government expense. Not unnaturally after a year or two the charm may wear off and the young man who has been provided for by a well-meaning Government, may decide that he is better fitted for other lines of work. American business houses with connections in the East are near at hand with dazzling salaries and the Government, therefore, is always liable to lose many of its young students before they have given back in service the Government funds which have been expended on their education.

Furthermore there are very few native teachers in the Orient who know enough of the English language to explain to beginners the fine points of Oriental languages and much time necessarily is lost to the student because of his difficulty in understanding his teacher. And so we in the Department have come to believe that a preliminary study of Oriental languages at home would be a far more economical method of training our officers than the present system, which allows of no return to the Government until after a minimum of two years of training in Oriental countries.

The reasons which make it necessary for Government agents to know the languages of the Orient apply equally to persons who are engaged in cultivating the extension of commerce between the United States and the countries of the Orient. A prosperous trade between two countries in itself cements the relations of those countries. Naturally, therefore, this Government is deeply interested in the extension of trans-Pacific commerce and is concerned when development of American enterprise is conducted in an unintelligent manner and in a way which does not command the sympathetic respect of the people of the Oriental countries. The lack of Americans who know Oriental languages is not merely a simple and negative handicap to American business and to the permanency of all kinds of American influence in those countries; rather it doubles the effectiveness of our great competitors by making it easier and more natural for Oriental countries to deal with them than with us.

In conclusion let me emphasize that the State Department is deeply interested in encouraging the study of Oriental languages in this country, believing that our relations with Oriental countries will be vastly benefited thereby and that many international problems which now seem difficult of adjustment will no longer be 'problems' when discussed in the light of mutual understanding. The Department would welcome the establishment of such a school as is now contemplated and would send to it embryo diplomatic and consular officers who are at present forced to undergo their schooling in Eastern Capitals. Such an institution would not only be of practical use to the Government but would serve as a powerful stimulus to the youth of the country in turning their thoughts to the great unknown East.

It would aid greatly in bringing about a closer understanding between America and the Orient and a deeper interest in the welfare of Asiatic peoples. It would develop a desire to exchange ideas and thought across the Pacific and this interchange would assure for all future times a spirit of firm friendship based on mutual respect and sympathy. In this way can America accomplish her ideals.